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P 110923Z MAY 07
FM AMCONSUL KOLKATA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1544
INFO RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1462
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 0644
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 0639
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0415
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0421
RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON 0275
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0340
RUEHPH/CDC CDC ATLANTA GA PRIORITY
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE USD FAS WASHINGTON DC
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHINGTON DC
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIUU/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
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SUBJECT: POULTRY FARM IN NORTH BENGAL REPORTS LARGE NUMBER OF BIRD DEATHS

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: In the first week of May, thousands of birds have died at a poultry farm in Siliguri, located in Northern West Bengal, near the border with Bangladesh. The Government of West Bengal (GOWB) has sealed the poultry farm. Preliminary health reports have found no evidence of an H5N1 Avian Influenza (AI) but rather indicate a possible Infectious Bursal Disease Virus. However, in view of the AI outbreaks in neighboring Bangladesh, GOWB has put in place precautionary measures and deployed equipment and personnel to investigate. The general public has only limited awareness of the recent deaths and the poultry industry in the state is still unaffected by possible AI concerns. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) May 4-8, around 2,500 poultry died in the privately-owned Aziz poultry farm, located 11 miles South of Siliguri town in North Bengal. The death of poultry birds in such large numbers has raised concern. The town is located close to India's border with Bangladesh, where there have been outbreaks of H5N1 virus. The Aziz poultry farm used to export to Bangladesh. Responding to the poultry deaths, a worried Darjeeling district administration has sealed the farm and posted a police cordon. A contact told Post, "We are not allowing a single bird, dead or alive, to enter or go out of the farm."

¶3. (SBU) Scientists and contacts in GOWB's Animal Resources Department (ARD) have collected samples that have been sent to the High Security Disease Detection Laboratory (HSDDL) in Bhopal via Kolkata. Results are expected in a few days. Reportedly, preliminary tests at Kolkata's ARD laboratory have indicated the possible presence of Infectious Bursal Disease Virus (also known as Gumboro disease) in the samples, which is rather common in commercial broilers. IBVD afflicts new flock if the parent birds are not properly inoculated. Contacts also told post that the sudden rise in atmospheric temperature in Siliguri and the excessive flock density in Aziz poultry may have triggered the deaths.

14. (SBU) ARD has deployed protective gear and equipment in Darjeeling and eight other districts located on India-Bangladesh border. India has stopped poultry imports from Bangladesh since the country reported outbreak of AI and as of March 25, personnel from ARD, supported by the Border Security Force, have been spraying vehicles coming in from Bangladesh. The outside, the undercarriage and the wheels are being sprayed with sodium hypochlorite solution. Our ARD contact said this chemical releases chlorine which, in turn, kills the virus. The insides of empty trucks are also being sprayed.

15. (SBU) COMMENT: While initial information indicates the recent poultry deaths were not AI related, with Bangladesh suffering H5N1 outbreaks, local health authorities are concerned about the potential for AI and are putting in place controls. The media is only now just focusing on the events in Siliguri and so there has been only limited public awareness of the situation and little immediate impact on the local poultry industry.

JARDINE